

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF INDIANA

FILED

LOUIS EDWARD GRANDPRE,

§

Plaintiff

FEB 11 2019

v.

U.S. CLERK'S OFFICE
INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA

ROBERT WILKIE,
SECRETARY OF THE DEPT. OF
VETERANS AFFAIRS,

§ Civil Action No. _____

&

1 : 19 - CV-0604 SEB -MJD

JAMES M. BYRNE,
GENERAL COUNSEL OF THE DEPT.
OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
AFFAIRS,
Defendants.

PLAINTIFF'S ORIGINAL COMPLAINT FOR DECLARATORY AND
INJUNCTIVE RELIEF TO THE HONORABLE UNITED STATES
DISTRICT COURT:

COMES NOW, LOUIS EDWARD GRANDPRE, hereinafter "Plaintiff", and files
the following complaint, directed to the United States Department of Veterans
Affairs (hereinafter, "VA") and the United States Department of Veterans Affairs
Office of General Counsel (hereinafter "VA OGC"), hereinafter "Defendants", and
for cause of action, would show the Court as follows:

PLAINTIFF'S ORIGINAL COMPLAINT
FOR DECLARATORY & INJUNCTIVE RELIEF

I. INTRODUCTION

1. This is an action by Plaintiff pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act (hereinafter, “FOIA”), 5 USC § 552, et seq, to order the production of agency records maintained by the VA. Plaintiff seeks the documentation set forth below and seek this Court’s assistance to compel production of documents wrongfully withheld from Plaintiff and to vindicate the statutory right to inspect federal agency documents. Plaintiff asserts that there is a “significant public interest in disclosure” of the records requested by Plaintiff.
2. This Court has jurisdiction over this action pursuant to 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(B), the Freedom of Information Act, and 28 U.S.C. § 2201, the Federal Declaratory Judgment Act.
3. The government records which Plaintiff requests are his individual claims files (hereinafter, “C-Files”) maintained by the VA in a system of records for Veterans making claims for Veterans Disability Compensation and/or Survivor Benefits claims pursuant to Title 38 of the United States Code. *See Exhibit A (Plaintiff’s FOIA Request).*

**PLAINTIFF’S ORIGINAL COMPLAINT
FOR DECLARATORY & INJUNCTIVE RELIEF**

II. JURISDICTION AND VENUE.

4. This Court has jurisdiction over this action pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1331, as this action arises under the laws of the United States, in particular, 5 U.S.C. § 552. In addition, this Court has jurisdiction over this action pursuant to 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(4)(b), under which, “the District Court of the United States, in the district in which the complainant resides ... has jurisdiction to enjoin the agency from withholding agency records and to order the production of any agency records improperly withheld from the complainant”, as Plaintiff’s residence is in this district.

III. PARTIES.

5. Plaintiff is an individual, and a resident of the State of INDIANA and resides at 17868 Sandy Run Ct, Noblesville, IN, 46062

6. Defendant ROBERT WILKIE is the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs, which is believed to maintain facilities throughout this District.

7. Defendant JAMES M. BYRNE is the General Counsel of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

IV. SERVICE.

8. Defendant ROBERT WILKIE, Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs, may be served by mailing a copy of this compliant and summons by certified mail to the following address: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 810 Vermont Avenue, NW, Washington, DC, 20420.

9. Defendant JAMES M. BYRNE, General Counsel of the Department of Veterans Affairs, may be served by mailing a copy of this compliant and summons by certified mail to the following address: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 810 Vermont Avenue, NW, Washington, DC, 20420.

10. The United States of America may be served by serving the U.S. Attorney for the district in which this action if brought JOSHUA MINKLER, 10 West Market Street, Suite 2100, Indianapolis, IN 46204, United States and by serving a copy of this complaint and a summons by certified mail to the Attorney General of the United States [U.S. Attorney General, 950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20530-0001].

V. FACTUAL ALLEGATIONS.

11. The FOIA requires U.S. government agencies to promptly make public records available to any person if that person makes a request which (1) reasonably describes the records sought and (2) complies with any applicable agency rules for making such a request. 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(3)(A).
12. The FOIA requires an agency to issue a final determination on any such information request within twenty (20) business days from the date of its receipt. 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(6)(A)(i)
13. The FOIA allows an agency to extend this determination deadline, however, by ten (10) working days when “unusual circumstances” exist and when the agency so notifies a requester in writing. 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(6)(B).
14. An agency is entitled to only one (1) ten-business day extension. Id. The written notice provided to the requester must specify the specific unusual circumstances justifying the extension and the date on which a final determination is expected to be dispatched. Id.

15. In limited circumstances, the FOIA allows an agency to invoke an extension beyond ten (10) days. To invoke a longer extension, the FOIA requires an agency to provide written notification to the requester that (1) offers the requester an opportunity to limit the scope of the request so that it may be processed within that time limit, or (2) offers the requester an opportunity to arrange with the agency an alternative time frame for processing the request. 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(6)(B)(ii).

16. Plaintiff served, and the VA received, a FOIA Request on 12/12/2018 seeking production of Plaintiff's C-File. See Exhibit A.

17. The VA has not fulfilled this request.

18. Plaintiff served a timely FOIA Appeal to the VA OGC on 01/10/2019, pursuant to 5 U.S.C. § 552(a)(6)(A)(ii). See Exhibit B. The FOIA Appeal FAX Transmittal sheet dated 01/10/2019. See, Exhibit D. Neither the VA nor the VA OGC has provided copies of Plaintiff's C-file, despite having actual knowledge of the statutory deadline to respond within 20 working days from receipt of appeal. See e.g., Exhibit A; Exhibit B.

VI. FIRST CAUSE OF ACTION.
(FOIA Request for Plaintiff's C-File)

19. Plaintiff incorporates the allegations in the foregoing paragraphs as though fully set forth herein.
20. FOIA mandates the disclosure of the documents that Plaintiff seeks in Plaintiff's FOIA request to the VA.
21. The VA has not provided Plaintiff with the records.
22. The VA has not sought extension to the lawful response time under FOIA.
23. No FOIA exemptions apply to this request.
24. No exceptional or unusual circumstances preclude a response to the request within twenty (20) business days of the request.
25. An actual and justiciable controversy exists as to whether the VA has violated the FOIA.
26. Plaintiff seeks declaratory judgment that FOIA entitles Plaintiff to the records it seeks as part of its FOIA request to the VA.
27. Unless enjoined and made subject to a declaration of Plaintiff's legal rights by this Court, the VA will continue to violate the rights of Plaintiff and others similarly situated by maintaining its pattern or practice of unlawfully delaying and/or denying and/or ignoring responses to FOIA requests and appeals.

IX. DEMAND FOR JURY TRIAL

28. Plaintiff respectfully prays for trial by jury, where not prohibited by law.

X. PRAYER FOR RELIEF

29. Wherefore, Plaintiff requests this Court:

- a) Order Defendant to provide true copies of all requested documents without further delay or obfuscation;
- b) Expedite this proceeding as provided for in 28 U.S.C. § 1657;
- c) IF APPROPRIATE: Award Plaintiff costs and reasonable attorney fees in this action, as provided in 5 U.S.C. §552(a)(4)(E), and/or under any other appropriate federal statute; and, award the plaintiff the cost of the filing fee.
- d) Grant such other and further relief as the Court, in its wisdom, may deem just and proper, including any damages for any violation of the U.S. Constitution that may arise herein.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,


LOUIS EDWARD GRANDPRE
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813-468-3047